

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 DIWY-01 SCS-03 DHA-02 EUR-12

DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 SCA-01 TRSE-00 /093 W

-----049916 230911Z /10

R 210500Z JUL 77

FM AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

TO AMEMBASSY JIDDA

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 5575

USLO RIYADH

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, CASC, SA

SUBJECT: MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OFFICIALS CONTINUE TO POUNCE ON
EMPLOYERS OF WOMEN

REF: (A) DHAHRAN 0187, (B) DHAHRAN 0271

1. DURING THE PAST TWO WEEKS CONGEN HAS LEARNED OF A NUMBER
OF CASES IN WHICH MINISTRY OF INTERIOR (MININT) OFFICIALS
HAVE CALLED ON EMPLOYERS OF WOMEN AND HAVE FORCED THEM TO
DISCHARGE THEIR WOMEN EMPLOYEES. SAG OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN
DEALING WITH THE SITUATION IN A CAPRICIOUS MANNER AND
THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT CURRENT UPSURGE OF ACTIVITY IS
DIRECTED AT AMERICANS. RECENT CASES WE HAVE HEARD OF INCLUDE:

A. IBM: A BRITISH FEMALE EMPLOYEE WAS DISCOVERED BY MININT
OFFICIALS ON COMPANY PREMISES AND IBM PROMPTLY DISMISSED THE
EMPLOYEE.

WOMEN ACTUALLY CONTINUED TO WORK IN IBM SECRETARIAL POOL HASTILY
CONVENED IN A COMPANY VILLA. POLICE CAME BY AND DEMANDED
WOMEN'S PASSPORTS AS PRELUDE TO DEPORTATION. IBM REFUSED

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ON ADVICE OF CONGEN AND COMPANY'S SAUDI PARTNER (JUFFALI)
WAS CALLED BEFORE POLICE. OUTCOME OF MEETING WAS THAT IBM
AGREED TO ACCEPT CEASE AND DESIST ORDER AND TO TURN ITS
FEMALE EMPLOYEES OUT OF ITS VILLA.

B. NORTHROP: AS REPORTED IN REF A, COMPANY FEELS IT IS
SCREENED FROM SAG INTERVENTION BY MODA CONTRACT AND A HIGH-

LEVEL "GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT" CONCERNING EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN. NEVERTHELESS, MININT OFFICIALS HAVE AGAIN CALLED AND INVITED NORTHROP TO EXPLAIN. US COMPANY HAS TURNED CASE OVER TO MODA. DEFENSE CONTRACTOR IS WORKING THROUGH BOTH MODA AND US MILITARY TRAINING MISSION TO RESOLVE WOMEN EMPLOYMENT PROBLEM. NORTHROP WAS ADVISED BY SAG PASSPORT OFFICE ON JULY 20 THAT IT WILL NO LONGER PROCESS RESIDENT PERMITS UNTIL COMPANY DISCHARGES FEMALE EMPLOYEES AND TURNS PASSPORTS OVER TO MININT SO THAT IT CAN LEVY FINES ON EMPLOYEE, SPONSOR, AND EMPLOYER. (FYI: WE HAVE HEARD RUMORS THAT NORTHROP, WHICH EMPLOY 60 AMERICAN FEMALES - ALL DEPENDENTS OF NORTHROP EMPLOYEES - IS CONSIDERED BY POLICE AS TEST CASE.)

C. ALLIANCE INSURANCE COMPANY: OFFICES WERE RECENTLY RAIDED, SEVERAL WOMEN WERE DETERMINED TO BE WORKING ON PREMISES AND WERE ORDERED DISCHARGED. COMPANY WAS ORDERED TO PAY FINES. -- NEXT DOOR TO ALLIANCE OF OFFICE OF ABDULLAH AL-RASHID -- PARTNER OF PRINCE MOHAMMED, (SON OF PRINCE FAHD). EARLIER THIS WEEK ITS SINGLE AMERICAN FEMALE EMPLOYEE WAS CAUGHT AND ORDERED TO LEAVE THE PREMISES. ALTHOUGH A FINE WAS THREATENED, SHE MANAGED TO TALK HER WAY PAST THE MININT OFFICIALS.

D. BEHRING INTERNATIONAL: THE COMPANY'S OFFICES WERE RECENTLY VISITED BY MININT INSPECTORS WHO ORDERED THE SOLE WOMAN EMPLOYEE DISCHARGED.

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D. BECHTEL: THE COMPANY'S ROYAL COMMISSION FOR JUBAIL AND YENBO OFFICE WAS VISITED BY TWO INSPECTORS FROM MININT ON JULY 12 AND ADVISED THAT COMPANY WAS VIOLATING SAUDI LAWS BY EMPLOYING WOMEN. TO ENFORCE ORDER, PASSPORT OFFICE SUSPENDED PROCESSING OF BECHTEL RESIDENCE PERMITS AND EXIT VISAS. ROYAL COMMISSION OFFICE FOR JUBAIL SENT OFFICIAL TO LOCAL MININT REPRESENTATIVES TO PROTEST AND IT WAS AGREED THAT US COMPANY COULD HAVE TWO WEEKS TO SETTLE ITS PROBLEMS. SUBSEQUENTLY PROCESSING OF DOCUMENTATION WAS RESUMED BY PASSPORT OFFICE. ON JULY 20, HOWEVER, MININT AGAIN SUSPENDED PROCESSING OF EXIT VISAS AND RESIDENCE PERMITS. MEANWHILE, BECHTEL HAS ASKED ROYAL COMMISSION SECRETARY-GENERAL FAROUK AKHDAR TO INTERVENE. NOTHING, SO FAR, HAS BEEN HEARD IN REGARD TO ACTION, IF ANY, TAKEN BY AKHDAR.

2. COMMENT: BECHTEL CASE IS PARTICULARLY DISTURBING. IN FEBRUARY COMPANY WAS ADVISED BY LETTER TO TERMINATE ALL WOMEN EMPLOYEES AND IT DID, FOR AWHILE, FURLOUGH ITS FEMALE WORK FORCE. COMPANY ASKED ITS SAUDI PARTNER, SALEIMAN OLAYAN, TO INTERCEDE WITH SAG AUTHORITIES -- WHICH HE DID. COMPANY WAS ADVISED THAT IT SHOULD CONSIDER THAT FEBRUARY LETTER HAD NEVER BEEN ISSUED. IN CURRENT SITUATION, COMPANY HAS NOT

RAISED THIS QUESTION AS IT WISHES TO SEE THE LAY OF THE LAND
FIRST. FROM CONGEN'S POINT OF VIEW, WE ARE CONCERNED THAT
PASSPORTS OF AMCIT EMPLOYEES AND THEIR DEPENDENTS ARE NOT BEING
VISAED BY SAG AUTHORITIES TO PERMIT THEM TO LEAVE THE
KINGDOM. BECHTEL HAS NOT YET, FORTUNATELY, HAD AN EMERGENCY
CASE TO SEE HOW FAR LOCAL PASSPORT OFFICE WILL GO IN
UPHOLDING MININT INSTRUCTION. IF LID ON BECHTEL DEPARTURES
IS HELD DOWN TIGHTLY, CONGEN WILL HAVE DIFFICULT IME
RESOLVING EMERGENCY PROBLEMS INCRRED WHEN BECHTEL EMPLOYEES
AND DEPENDENTS WISH TO DEPART KINGDOM. POST NOTES THIS IS
PEAK OF VACATION SEASON AND MAY EMPLOYEES HAVE MADE PLANS
TO LEAVE, WITH THEIR FAMILIES IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS.

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NSAE-00 SIL-01 DIWY-01 SCS-03 DHA-02 EUR-12
DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
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R 210500Z JUL 77
FM AMCONSUL DHAHRAN
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USLO RIYADH

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3. A SENIOR RESIDENT MINFIN OFFICIAL IN EASTERN PROVINCE
(WHO HASMANAGED TO HIRE SIX SAUDI WOMEN AS PERMANENT CLERICAL
STAFF IN HIS OFFICE) ADVISED POST THAT PERHAPS SOLUTION TO
PROBLEM OF FOREIGN WOMEN WORKING IT TO OBTAIN WORK PERMITS
FOR THEM THROUGH MINISTRY OF LABOR (MINLAB). HE COMMENTED THAT
AS SAUDI ARABIA IS DESPERATELY SHORT OF TRAINED SECRETARIES
MINLAB SHOULD BE ABLE TO SIGN NECESSARY RELEASE PAPERS TO
PERMIT FOREIGN WIVES TO WORK (HE ALSO POINTED OUT THAT THERE
ARE NO WRITTEN SAUDI LAWS WHICH CAN PRECLUDE MINLAB FROM
TAKING SUCH AN ACTION).

4. THIS WEEK SENIRO FSL, WITH GOOD CONNECTIONS IN LOCAL
MINLAB OFFICE, RAISED FOREGOING WITH ASS'T DIRECTOR OF
LABOR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS IN EASTERN PROVINCE. THE OFFICIAL
COMMENTED THAT HIS OFFICE, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SAUDI LAW, MADE

OFFICE SURVEYS WHICH LED TO MININT TURNING WOMEN OUT OF OFFICES. HE EXPLAINED THAT THESE WOMEN ARE WORKING IN VIOLATION OF SAUDI LAW AND RATHER THAN POINTING OUT THAT THESE WOMEN DID NOT HAVE WORK PERMITS, THE OFFICIAL STRESSED THAT WORKING CONDITIONS IN OFFICES DO NOT MATCH CONDITIONS PRESCRIBED BY LAW (I.E., WOMEN ARE NOT SEGREGATED IN SEPARATE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ROOMS AND ARE NOT PROVIDED WITH SEPARATE REST ROOM FACILITIES). OFFICIAL THEN OBSERVED THAT HIS OFFICE HAD RECEIVED ANY NUMBER OF INQUIRIES FROM COMPANIES WISHING TO OBTAIN WORKING PERMITS FOR FOREIGN WOMEN NOW RESIDENT IN SAUDI ARABIA. IN REPLY HE STATED THAT HE HAS REQUESTED INSTRUCTIONS FROM MINISTRY OF LABOR IN RIYADH AND HAS NOT RECEIVED REPLY. CONVERSATION CONCLUDED WITH MINLAB OFFICIAL ASKING CONGEN TO TAKE MATTER UP PERSONALLY IN RIYADH.

5. IN EALIER MESSAGE (SEE REF A) POST HAS ASKED EMBASSY TO SCOUT OUT THIS MATTER AND ADVISE. NO REPLY HAS BEEN FORTHCOMING. POST STRESSES THAT THIS IS IMPORTANT MATTER BOTH FROM STANDPOINT OF PROTECTION OF AMCITS AND TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO AMERICAN COMPANIES WORKING HERE. IF US CITIZENS, AS IN CASE OF BECHTEL, ARE BEING DENIED FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT BY SAG OFFICIALS IN ARBITRARY FASHION, SAG SHOULD BE ADVISED OF OUR DISPLEASURE. HOPEFULLY, THE SITUATION CAN BE TURNED AROUND BEFORE IT CAN ADVERSELY AFFECT OUT BI-LATERAL RELATIONS (AND, AS WELL, DRAW UNFAVORABLE ATTENTION TO SAUDI ARABIA IN U.S. PRESS). FINALLY, US COMPANIES MAKE UP LARGEST CONTINGENT IN LOCAL FOREIGN BUSINESS COMMUNITY. IF THEY ARE DENIED ACCESS TO FOREIGN FEMALE LABOR MARKET, IT WOULD HAVE IMPORTANT EFFECT ON THEIR ABILITY TO OPERATE HERE (AND, AT THE LEAST, SHARPLY INCREASE THEIR OPERATING COSTS IF THEY ARE REQUIRED TO RECRUIT AND BRING IN MALE CLERICAL FORCE). U.S. BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND RESIDENT AMCITS ARE EXTEMELY NERVOUS REGARDING SITUATION DESCRIBED ABOVE AND POST URGES THAT APPROPRIATE DISCUSSION BE HELD WITH SENIOR SAG OFFICIALS TO DEVELOP PROCEDURE WHEREBY AMERICAN COMPANIES CAN GAIN WORK PERMITS FOR WORKING WIVES AND, AT BARE MINIMUM, MAKE CERTAIN THAT NO AMCIT IS DENIED EXIT PERMIT BECAUSE EMPLOYER IS UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR LABOR VIOLATIONS.

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6. ACTION REQUESTED: POST WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY JIDDA/USLO RIYADH TREATING THIS AS AN URGENT MATTER TO BE DISCUSSED

WITH SENIOR SAG OFFICIALS. IT IS CLEAR THAT AMERICAN COMPANIES
ARE VIOLATING SAUDI LAWS BYEMPLOYING WOMEN WITHOUT WORK
PERMITS, SO EMBASSY DISCUSSIONS SHOULD FOCUS ON WAYS TO
LEGALIZE STATUS OF AMERICAN WOMEN WORKING IN SAUDI ARABIA.
MINLAB MAY BE APPROPRIATE STARTING POINT. BELIEVE, IN THIS
REGARD, THAT FAROUK AKHDAR SHOULD ALSO BE CONSULTED SINCE
(A) AS A MODERNIZER HE IS CONCERNED WITH THE GENERAL ISSUE
OF STATUS OF WOMEN IN SAUDI ARABIA AND (B) HE IS FACED
WITH IMMEDIATE PROBLEM OF ASSISTING BECHTEL. AKHDAR COULD PROVE
TO BE VALUABLE ALLY IN SEEKING SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM.
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Message Attributes

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Sent Date: 21-Jul-1977 12:00:00 am
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Disposition Case Number: n/a
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